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## California Postsecondary Education Commission

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# The Nexus Between Workforce Development and Postsecondary Education – A Research Update

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In the two years since the Commission made the nexus between workforce development and postsecondary education a priority, the topic has grown significantly in importance in California and nationally. Numerous reports argue that challenges exist in preparing students for a fast-moving knowledge-based global economy. It is a topic that all educators are grappling with—not just in colleges and universities, but also at the K-12 level. The growing discussion validates the Commission’s priority focus on the nexus and its interest in providing information to inform State policy on higher education.

The Commission plans four papers examining the nexus. It also established a Workforce Advisory Committee and continues to consult with them as the project progresses. The first paper, providing a historical context for the topic, was presented to the Commission in December 2005. In December 2006, the Commission received the second paper in which the business and employer communities identified concerns with the skills and knowledge of the workforce. That paper showed that there is a significant gap between what employers need and what they see in the current labor pool—a gap in which both K-12 and postsecondary education are seen to have a role.

Commission staff is currently working on the third paper in the series, targeted for presentation this September. That paper will explore what higher education systems are currently doing to address workforce needs and to respond to the gap identified by employers. To do that, staff conducted extensive research on the University of California, the California State University, and California Community Colleges, and sought information as well on the independent colleges and universities. The State Constitution, the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, and legislative statutes were reviewed along with numerous system-based documents and plans. Detailed questions were developed to identify how the systems assess workforce needs and what mechanisms are used to establish goals, measure results, and identify gaps. That set of questions is attached to this report.

The results of staff research into these questions were captured in informal papers on each of the systems—UC, CSU, the Community Colleges, and the private institutions—which were shared with the Statutory Advisory Committee (SAC) in early May in order to gather feedback on the accuracy and completeness of the research. Staff also sought the assistance of the SAC members to fill informational gaps and to identify key people in the systems to be interviewed for additional information. SAC members helped clarify issues and provided contacts for in-depth interviews.

Data generated for the June accountability reports assessing the contributions higher education makes to the State’s economic, civic, and social development are also being used to inform nexus research. The measures of degrees awarded in areas of projected workforce need, educational attainment of the population, and per capita income by educational attainment are relevant to the overall question of how well California postsecondary education is doing in meeting workforce needs. That data will be considered in preparing the next report on the nexus and incorporated appropriately.

## **Attachment I: CPEC Basic Questions on Postsecondary Systems and Workforce Development**

- 1. Have the seminal policies that frame the segment's mission in regard to preparing students for success in California's workforce been identified?** Do they include the State Constitution, Education Code, State Master Plan, segmental strategic plans, adopted policies or strategies, mission statements, or other documents? To what extent do other elements in an institution's mission affect its workforce role?
- 2. How are changes made to the segment's policies and strategies?** Organizationally, how is authority and responsibility for policy decision making structured? What role do the Governor, Legislature, or other individuals or entities play in shaping priorities, strategies and policies regarding workforce development? What influence is exerted by governing boards, system offices, associations, campus leaders, faculty, system or campus committees, or other stakeholders on the system's response to changes in state workforce needs?
- 3. How do the various levels of academic autonomy impact the policy setting and implementation process governing workforce policies and strategies?** For example, what limits the influence of state government, governing boards, or system offices on policy or on its implementation on individual campuses? How does this organizational structure impact the response to workforce needs?
- 4. What mechanism does the system have to gauge changes in workforce needs, devise appropriate policies to align programs with these changes, and measure how well these policies contribute to assuring the right nexus between the system/institution and California's workforce needs?** Who is responsible for this work? Do they regularly report on the system's alignment to state workforce needs? What mechanism is in place to forecast future workforce needs and put in place timely responses that assure a tight alignment between the education provided by the system and the knowledge that graduates need for success when they enter the workforce?
- 5. How do enrollment choices by students impact the ability of the system/institutions to respond to California's workforce need and what programs have been put in place to ensure students make well informed enrollment decisions?** To what extent do enrollment choices reflect (or create) market demand? What kind of counseling or other mechanisms is provided to help students link their educational goals with life/work goals?
- 6. What are the exemplary programs?** What gaps in higher education preparation have been defined and what specific programs have been implemented to close those gaps? What public-private partnerships have been put in place to respond to those gaps, and have any evaluations been done to determine whether those partnerships are providing the expected level of benefits?
- 7. What are the degrees that the system offers, how many students earn those degrees, and what proportion of the demand by California employers for graduates with those degrees does the segment satisfy?** What proportion of the workforce need do graduates of the system satisfy, and which degree areas show evidence of either an under- or oversupply of college graduates?
- 8. *[For the independent colleges]* What are the drivers that determine how independent colleges respond to changes in workforce needs?** What public policies (student aid, licensing and regulations) impact the ability of private colleges to respond to workforce needs? Do independent colleges operate collectively to respond to workforce needs or are responses specific only to individual institutions? To what extent do independent colleges have a public responsibility to workforce development, if any?